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Augustan Rome:
The Transformation of the Eternal City

By

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As Julius Caesar¹ lay dead on the steps of the senate, the world for Gaius Octavius² (who later became Augustus) would never be the same, as he would join Mark Antony³ and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus⁴ in a triumvirate⁵ of power over the Roman Republic. During this period Augustus had many ideas on how to improve the problems that plagued the city of Rome. Unfortunately the young Octavius had little power in the senate to convey these ideas. In the period prior to his reign, building projects were more for public appeal and power gain. These propagandist projects rarely affected the functionality of Rome, and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. In 42 B.C. Julius Caesar was deified, making Octavius the (adopted) son of a god. Octavius and Antony then crushed Lepidus, giving them more power but there was still an underlying rivalry, they desired supreme power. Octavius was fortunate when Antony betrayed the Republic of Rome in 32 B.C., in favor of his love interest, Cleopatra of Egypt. This was the result of the Republic's declaration of war on Cleopatra and Egypt. After a couple battles during this civil war the final battle took place at Actium.⁶ Octavius's victory over Mark Antony at the battle of Actium, sealed the fate of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire.

¹ *Julius Caesar* was the final dictator in the Roman Republic, who had been in the original Triumvirate. He was brutally murdered by a group of senators led by Marcus Licinius Brutus in 44 B.C. as a result of his declaration of supreme power. (Wikipedia)

² *Gaius Octavius* was the son of a senator, but came from a humble background. From a young age he was admired by Julius Caesar, both for his intelligence and his military prowess. He would be adopted by Caesar through his will, taking the name Caesar and joining the Julian family. For his duties and successes that made the empire a safe place he obtained the title of Augustus. (Wikipedia)

³ *Mark Antony* was a member of the Second Roman Triumvirate; the other two were Augustus and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. He lived from 83 BC– 30 BC, most remembered for his relationships with Julius Caesar and Cleopatra. He betrayed Rome when the senate declared war on Egypt, which was ruled by Cleopatra, Antony's love interest.

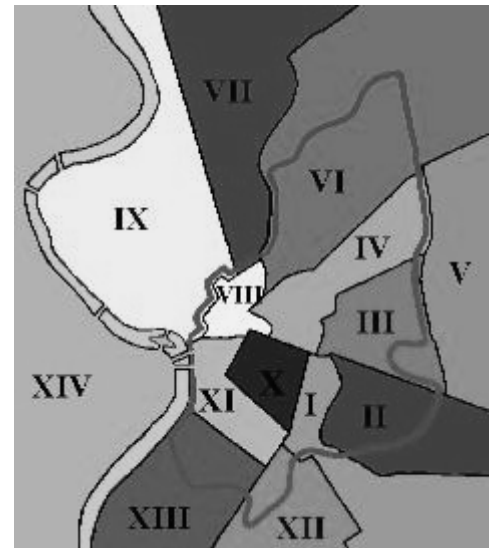
⁴ *Marcus Aemilius Lepidus* was the third member of the second Triumvirate. In 42 B.C. he was defeated by Augustus and Antony. (Wikipedia)

⁵ *Triumvirate* was a group of three men who together were responsible for public administration or civil authority in the government system of ancient Rome. (Wikipedia)

⁶ *Battle of Actium* or also known as the last battle of the Republic, took place in the Ionian Sea between Augustus and Mark Antony. It was there that Augustus defeated Antony's forces securing the stability of Rome and sole power of the Empire. Antony and Cleopatra fled the battle and later committed suicide. This was the final battle in the Last War of the Republic as it would change after Augustus's victory to the Roman Empire. (Wikipedia)

After Actium, Octavius had all the power and support of the senate to rule the Empire. Octavius denied the dictatorship but he still had supreme power as no other politician dared challenge him. He served consulships more than any other ruler before and after, but he preferred that the senate be intact as it would make his governmental changes more efficient. Other politicians served as consul either with or without Augustus. All this power and support was good as there was no struggle for power, and the Empire became stable. This stability allowed Augustus to finally obtain his goal of restoring the city of Rome while creating an image that would stand alone.

Augustus began his renewal in the place where he gained his power, the government. By establishing the *Pax Romana* or “Roman Peace”, Augustus was able to restructure the way government and daily life in Rome worked. These reforms began with the government and laws that encouraged the investment of culture, architecture, and the restructuring of offices to accommodate these new projects. His devotion to justice expanded the courts in Rome to sort through the cases that seemed too numerous for such a city. As he formed offices to expand the responsibilities to more people so that more would be accomplished, he was faced with a difficult issue. The city was enormous, population was believed to be close to a million. His solution was to divide the city into fourteen districts and establish overseers for each section of the city. These districts improved efficiency in the city and Augustus’s ability to maintain it.



- These are the 14 zones of Rome.
<http://web.mac.com/heraklia/Augustus/Augustus/graphics/14Regiones.jpg>

The funding for these projects came primarily from two places, private donations, and the city's treasury which was fed by the gains of war and taxation. The importance of these building projects couldn't really be put into dollars or cents but in the value that they attributed to the functionality of the city and the investment in its prosperity. These projects were within the city's limits and so the funds that were invested into them stayed in the local area, strengthening the local economy and functionality. These projects also employed the masses which improved the lives of many in the lower classes of Rome raising their status and prosperity. The result of good planning and ingenuity allowed for the city of Rome and its local economy to flourish in the Age of Augustus.

Augustus did all this work through his ability to rule not as a dictator or king, but as an Emperor that shared power with the rest of the governing bodies and gave the citizens of Rome a larger voice. His goal was to build a better Rome so that it could be respected as the capital of the empire and live on in prosperity. Augustus said that he found Rome built of bricks and left it clothed in marble.⁷ After his death in 14 AD, Rome was in far better shape and appearance than when he gained power in 31 BC standing true to his word. Augustus's reforms and renewal projects were crucial to Rome's status as the capitol of the Roman Empire and its becoming an eternal city that surpassed that of any other city of antiquity.

The authors of antiquity that reveal the most information on Augustus's projects are those of Suetonius and Tacitus. Suetonius's book *the Twelve Caesars* is a history on the eleven rulers that followed Julius Caesar and Julius Caesar himself. This has a large section devoted to the triumphs of Augustus over the city of Rome and its inhabitants. Suetonius lived only a half century after Augustus so he lived in the post Augustan city of Rome. To see the larger affect that he had created, books like *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* by Karl

⁷ Gaius Suetonius Tranquillius. *The Twelve Caesars*. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1957), 61

Galinsky, *Ancient Rome: the Archaeology of the Eternal City* by Jon Coulston and Hazel Dodge, and *Rome and Environs: An Archaeology Guide* by Filippo Coarelli show the results of the building projects that improved Rome and its inhabitants. The Coulston, Dodge book and Coarelli book are both archeological guides which look at the evidence left behind in some of the more important parts of the city such as the Forum, Campus Martius, Capitoline and Palatine Hills, and the infrastructure that fed the city and helped it function. These books were helpful to illustrate the city and its major projects that were started and finished by Augustus. All these books though fall short in focusing on the question of what significance Augustan urban renewal had on the city. Other authors such as Z. Yavetz, Harry Evans, and M. K. Thornton provided a greater understanding into smaller sections of Augustan Rome. Z. Yavetz was the most helpful because of the topic he provided, *The Living Conditions of Urban Plebs in Republican Rome* discusses the poor conditions in which the plebs (lower class), had to live in regards to housing. This is a topic that is not discussed in great detail by any of the other sources.

Another problem with my sources is that they are hard to decipher what is evidence and what is speculation. Many of the authors draw conclusion on certain areas that are already unclear and sometimes their conclusion fogs it more. Michael Grant's book, *The Roman Forum* give a great amount of facts on the history of the forum, except when it came to Augustus. One section of the book mentions how the Forum underwent some of its greatest change under Augustus but then it just moves on. This was disappointing because of the great amount of history that this book reveals, with Augustus he completely ignores.

The hardest part of finding good sources for this topic was finding an author who discusses Augustus and what he did for the city of Rome rather than what he did for the empire.

Augustus's works on the city was for most authors a back thought, as if the accomplishments of cleaning and rebuilding Rome was not important compared to his battles Gaul and his triumphs of his youth. For the most part though authors gave just enough so that the combination of works could be pieced together and compared creating a conclusion would not be difficult.

The streets of Rome were traditionally viewed as one of the most appealing components of Rome, so it was strange for Augustus to declare them to be in bad shape. There were offices specifically created to serve the same purpose as a modern transit office, overseeing the conditions, traffic, volume, and possible improvements that could be made to the city streets. But as Augustus discovered, these officials had not truly been doing their jobs; the streets in some places were not even paved. During the Augustan Age (30 B.C. – 14 A.D.), there was little war and no civil war, so the conditions in the empire improved.⁸ This posed a new problem for Augustus in that the influx of unemployment was tremendous, which caused a migration from the outer areas of the empire to the city due to its supposed prosperity. Because unemployment was high, the incidence of loitering was also high, which created potential for civil disorder and the risk of fire and crime.⁹ To solve these problems, Augustus saw one solution: to embark on an improvement of all the roads in Rome which would in turn create jobs, increase traffic flow, and decrease the risks of loitering.¹⁰ These projects also had a beautification element in that the old road system was decaying, displaying signs weakness and lack of prosperity which degraded the capital's worth.

The first problem that Augustus encountered was to improve the offices that oversaw the maintenance of the city, as past officials had overlooked the poor conditions of the current

⁸ Karl Galinsky. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Title Page

⁹ Galinsky, 237.

¹⁰ Ibid.

infrastructure. His first move was to appoint his most trusted friend, Marcus Agrippa¹¹, to the office of Aedile. The Aedile position was meant to oversee the maintenance of the city's streets and sewers.¹² With Agrippa in this position, Augustus would not have to worry about the conditions of the infrastructure in the city and could focus his attention to greater projects that would increase the city's prosperity.

With all the pieces in place, Augustus began the cleaning and paving of the streets, both leading into the city, and those existing within its boundaries. As the preservation was very poor in previous years, the streets were overcrowded and needed to be cleaned. When Augustus first came into power, the city streets were overflowing. They were full of people and goods, many of which were crowded to the point that it became hazardous to the city's health.¹³ One way that he attempted to fix this problem was to create gathering areas and new markets to help the movement of traffic through the city and alleviate congestion.¹⁴ One major result of cleaning and paving the streets was that much of the unemployed population was able to find work.

In the Augustan Age a new way of controlling traffic emerged, the use of arches to separate sections of the city. These are seen in numerous locations all around the city acting as portals from one area to another. Augustus saw the importance of separating the city into numerous sections to reduce the confusion created by the immense size of the city. Each arch and portico had an inscription on it that indicated the location.¹⁵

¹¹ *Marcus Agrippa* was considered Augustus's closest friend who served next to him in the Final War of the Republic against Mark Antony. He lived from 63 B.C. to 12 B.C. and was the biggest helper to the Augustan renovation and renewal project in the city of Rome. His most notable accomplishments were those of the Aqueduct system.

¹² Galinsky, 240

¹³ Galinsky, 237.

¹⁴ ?

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 250.

Augustus didn't stop at the city streets; he worked on improving the city of Rome from the foundation to the rooftops. He understood that Rome's geographical location in a valley with many streams and tributaries meant a constant need to direct and redirect water flow in and around the city. Marcus Agrippa's position of Aedile also included overseeing the sewers.

Rome's population was around one million at the start of the Augustan Age. The city sewer system was a mess; often during annual floods, the sewage of this massive number of people poured into the city streets. As one could imagine, the scene of waste floating by the front door is somewhat less than desirable for any city, let alone the capital of the Roman Empire. These sewage overflows often created massive plagues that affected many of the citizens including those of the upper classes.

Many of the sewers that ran through areas such as the Forum and the Campus Martius were also meant to channel streams that flowed down from the surrounding slopes that lined much of the city. These sewers were full of materials and vegetation that restricted the flows which time after time caused flooding during peak rainy seasons. This was cleaned up and all these obstructions were moved.

As projects were underway to fix the streets and sewers, more pressing projects were also developing. For almost 280 years Rome's water resources were fed through four major aqueducts: the Aqua Appia, Anio Vetus, Aqua Marcia, and the Aqua Tepula. However at their current state they were considered to be in poor condition. Because of the focus on war and civil unrest in the empire over the last hundred years, the city's water supply was largely neglected. The city's tremendous growth over that time was also not accounted for, which caused even more problems such as a lack of increase in capacity of the aqueducts along with the population

growth. With Rome's water system in peril, Augustus again relied on his good friend Marcus Agrippa for help, appointing him to take charge of the repair to this decaying system.

Agrippa began repairs on all existing aqueducts and created new branches off of them to supply the untouched regions which had seen more growth during the century of neglect. He repaired the majority of the aqueducts, but as the expansion of services in the city began, the expansion of the water supply was needed as well.

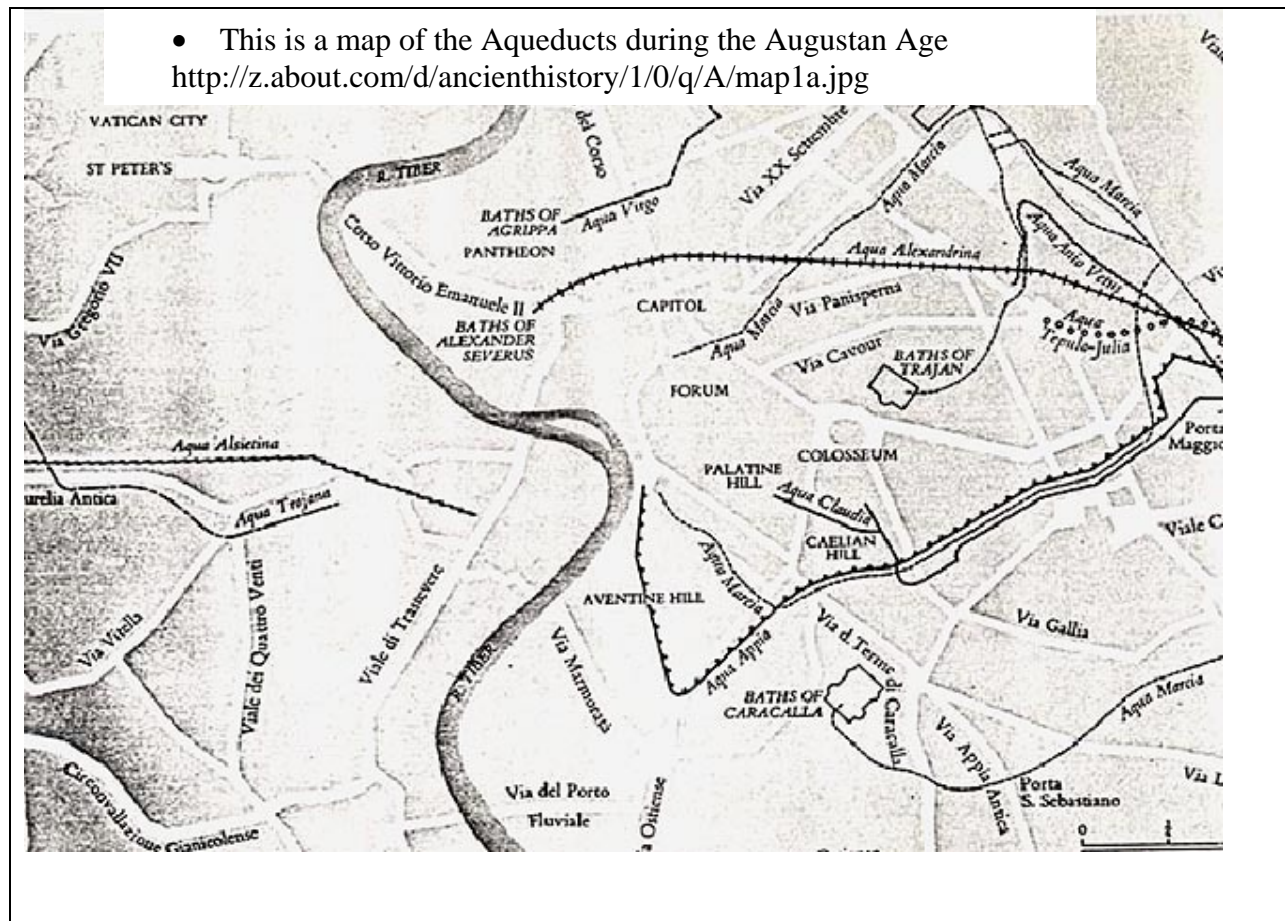
In 33BC, the completion of the Aqua Iulia greatly increased the amount of water supplied to the city.¹⁶ This aqueduct connected to the Aqua Tepula by a conduit, thus the two supplied a great deal of water to Rome. In 19BC the completion of the Aqua Virgo set new marks in Roman history as it was not only the first aqueduct to flow from the North, but also was the lowest in elevation.¹⁷ Its primary role was to supply water to the baths and other water features in the Campus Martius. It served two other regions in Rome, but it was primarily for the Campus Martius. In 2BC the completion of the Aqua Alsentina by Augustus again broke new ground, becoming the highest aqueduct in Rome, and the only aqueduct exclusively supplying one region. This was believed to be the dirtiest water, undrinkable according to Frontinus.¹⁸ Primarily, it supplied the industrial sector of Rome, such as the mills as well as entertainment arenas. This aqueduct became very important to the success of industry and labor in Rome's industrial zone.

¹⁶ (Coulston, Jon, Dodge Hazel. Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)., 168

¹⁷ Ibid., 176

¹⁸ *Frontinus* was a distinguished commander with no experience in hydraulic engineering, who was appointed to the *curator aquarum* in 97AD. He had written a personal handbook on the aqueduct and water system in Rome to pass down to his successor describing the quality and history of the entire water supply system in the city of Rome. He calculated the capacities and other important dimensions of the aqueducts. His calculations are believed to be close but due to the fact that there are no other numbers his are the best to go off of. Jon Coulston, Hazel Dodge. *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 166.

The impact of Agrippa and Augustus's work on the aqueduct and water system was very important to the continuing expansion and prosperity of Rome. It broke a ninety-two year spell of no expansion or maintenance to the water supply system. In twenty-nine years, Augustus and Agrippa were able to expand and build almost as many aqueducts as the previous two hundred seventy-nine years. This improvement allowed for the building of 1,200 fountains,



pools, and basins for public use throughout the city.¹⁹ This number does not include the several bath complexes also built in the forty-seven year reign of Augustus. The impact was lasting because as Agrippa took the office of Aedile, Augustus formed another that would permanently look after the maintenance of the aqueducts, the office of *cura aquarum* after Agrippa's death in

¹⁹ Coulston and Dodge, 170

12 B.C.²⁰ In this office there would be three men appointed to be presidents, with a staff of architects, surveyors, and engineers. Agrippa used his personal slaves to accomplish the work on the aqueducts, all 240 of them, and afterward the slaves were made public property to continue maintaining the water system.²¹

The Roman Forum was an important feature in the city of Rome. It served as the meeting place for their government and their headquarters in trade. Augustus's work in the Forum was both finishing projects from the years of Julius Caesar to building new temples and redesigning the way that it was used. To go over every project that he had undertaken would be lengthy and unnecessary because in the end it was the overall value and some of the smaller project that changed the way it was used and configured. Instead the focus will fall on projects like the Arch of Augustus, the Forum of Augustus, and the Portico of Gaius and Lucius. Leaving out the restoration of the Basilica Julia and its important roles in Augustan Rome must be acknowledged. Augustus reformed the way government in Rome was to work in the new age of Roman unity; restoring and expanding the Forum's purpose as well. One project that was not important in the function of everyday life in Rome but important to the Forum's growing prestige is the Milliarium Aureum. The Milliarium Aureum was a marker located behind the Rostra, which marked the center of the Roman Empire and world, along with the place that all roads ended as they came to Rome from all the provinces. Being at the center of the empire is both good and bad, as Rome attracts those who need help those who do not.

The first project to be looked at is that of the restoration of the Basilica Julia. Originally dedicated by Julius Caesar the building was not finished until the Age of Augustus. Augustus with his expanding of government and justice started applying multiple uses for each building.

²⁰ Ibid., 167

²¹ Ibid., 168

The Basilica Julia was used both as a building of justice and commerce. As Augustus was determined to crack down on crime, he had to expand the courts but as there was still space he for commercial reasons. This building had extended meaning to Augustus as it was also a monument to the Julian family, so the restoration and dual purpose design only increased the impact that the building had on the Forum. The final goal of that was to expand the purpose of each building in the forum to increase its importance.

The next two projects changed the layout of the present and future Forums of Rome. With the construction of the Arch of Augustus and the Portico of Gaius and Lucius, Augustus had engineered a way to control traffic through the Forum. As the Forum had much importance to society it attracted large volumes of people, often creating cramped spaces. With the construction of the Temple of Divus Julius at the southeastern end of the Forum pavement, Augustus had created a closed rectangular area. On the northern side of the Temple Divus Julius he had expanded in the renovation of the Basilica Aemilia the Portico of Gaius and Lucius. While on the southern side he had constructed the Arch of Augustus. At first glance little importance could be found, but another will show that Augustus created separation from the different sections of the Forum closing off the Rostra and pavement area which had improve the flow of traffic. As citizens lived in crowded spaces and the streets of Rome were full to the max of people, it became more important for these open spaces in the forum as it would relieve the crowded citizens with open space. Along with continuing his architectural theme of closing spaces he prevented the viewer from becoming overwhelmed.

The building of the Forum of Augustus was important in the preservation of the images of their past and their present. Inside the walled Forum was a portico that housed sculptures of great leaders of Rome's past as well as of the Julio-Claudian family. This structure was

constructed with exotic materials and the main piece lay in the rear of the complex with the Temple of Mars Uthor. The importance of this project though was not directly to the Forum's daily use but it provided steady employment for forty years. Though the exact numbers of employed are not known, the numbers are believed to be high.

The greatest importance of the projects in the Forum was that it increased employment to a high level and fueled the local economy. It also created an area of great value and tradition drawing importance to the city of Rome. The importance of the Roman Forum's continuous renovations were important to the value of Rome's prestige and power, but more importantly it employed large numbers of people to continuously rebuild, maintain and construct new buildings and monuments. In the end of his reign Augustus had undertaken thirteen projects, which were both large and small that kept the work flowing and the Forum expanding. As the city was continuing to grow along with the government and all the new roles and offices added the Forum too had to expand. In the city of Rome there were many different forums through out the city, so Augustus's focus to turn the Roman Forum into such an extravagant area was also meant to create separation from those other forums.

In the initial years of the Augustan Age, Rome's buildings were in very poor condition. Houses and other structures were often held together by wooden struts and supports.²² As Augustus began improving other sectors of life and economy, increasing rates of employment benefitted many Romans which sparked improvements to structures throughout Rome. Housing

²² Karl Galinsky. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 237.

in Republican Rome was very poor because contractors and landlords did not want to spend the money to build quality housing but rather sub-par housing and more of it. This resulted in the most recognizable problem with the city of Rome; constant fire and building failure. This is the area that Augustus and his agenda fell short but was most needed. Augustus knew that the housing in Rome was poorly constructed with walls that were far too thin to support a second or third story.²³ These poor building practices contributed greatly to the collapses and fires that plagued the city and its inhabitants. The greater disaster that these collapses contributed is that often the victims could not pay for the reconstruction and if they could the cost would be outrageous. But the cause of the building quality was the continuous inflation of the building's plot value. With these values increasing so much, the builders could not afford adequate materials and often had to cut corners to complete the job without expending all their resources.

During Augustus's reign he did only one thing to fix the housing quality problem, but its impact was so minimal that it was virtually useless. Augustus began restricting the heights of buildings so that the amount of material needed to build a house would decrease and the quality would increase. But the problems still continued due to the great increase in the city's population during the age of Augustus and its prosperity. Housing was still an issue, and it was apparent that Augustus was not as driven to deliver the plebs from these living conditions. His use of enclosed areas were multi-purposed, both at separation of the crowds and the hiding of the ghetto like conditions that lined the city.

The one area of housing that Augustus focused was on the outward appearance. Augustus instructed the people of Rome to follow his example of not building lavish or showy exteriors to create a unified look to all houses, that of modesty. His home was built on the Palatine Hill and

²³ Z Yavetz. "The Living Conditions of Urban Plebs in Republican Rome." *Latomus*, Vol. 17 (1958):500-517 JSTOR. 28 May 2009.), 509

was considered very small compared to most upper class homes of antiquity. It was the interior though that was emphasized by Augustus as his home was very lavish on the inside. He had instructed the people of Rome, every class, to fill their interiors with lavish cultural beauty to impress their guests. The reason that Augustus urged the people of Rome to not invest in their exteriors was to create contrast to the city for several reasons. One of the main reasons was that the city was very large, and often confusing because most buildings looked alike and were often built of similar materials. The other is that throughout the city there are monuments and buildings of importance that Augustus wanted to stand out as landmarks. This would create uniformity that would show the prosperity of the city and its inhabitants.

The city also experienced a change during the Augustan period that transformed the landscape. Augustus was inspired to create a greener landscape in the city of Rome to resemble the great cities of the past, such as Alexandria. The city of Rome had very few green spaces, really only the sacred grove of Republican Rome.²⁴ It was under Augustus that the city's landscape became a greener more lush part of the scheme. Augustus's ideal of having a uniform city with humble residences inspired many of the wealthy to invest in ornate, powerful garden and green spaces. This explosion in gardens subsequently created a greenbelt around the outer edges of the city. Augustus also invested into these green spaces in many different parts of the city, by creating landscape showcase in the Campus Martius, developing parklands on the bank of the Tiber near the Mausoleum. He created an elaborate public park with a warm water pool and garden on an old Esquiline ditch.²⁵ Augustus's works on creating park areas was very important in creating happiness and prosperity in the city, which was very cramped and crowded and lacked the lively presence of foliage.

²⁴ Galinsky, Karl. The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005)., 251

²⁵ Galinsky.,251

Rome's signature features were also expanded greatly during this period, those of the pools, basins and baths. As previously mentioned there were over 1,200 of these constructed during the reign of Augustus, 500 fountains, of which many were high quality, 700 pools and basins created for public use.²⁶ For the first time an aqueduct had been built with a primary purpose supplying a bath and other water features around it. Baths were very important to Rome's image which is often misunderstood. Baths were not just for bathing but acted more like spas. The question comes up though about baths, and whether they had access by the general public or by private citizens.²⁷ Never the less the public had access to many pools around the city. The impact that these water features had on the citizens no matter the class was significant. In warmer climates like Rome, public pools made good areas to cool down without wading in the Tiber's dirty waters.

As a result of all of Augustus's work, the transformation from a city that had no plan turning it into a city of marble and functionality. Augustus greatly improved the living conditions of those who lived in and around Rome's walls as well as increasing the value and appeal of the city. Augustus's reforms and renewal projects were crucial to Rome's status as the capitol of the Roman Empire and its becoming an eternal city that surpassed that of any other city of antiquity. The status of the city Rome was restore and reach all new highs, becoming a city that is used as an example of how modern cities should be planned and operated. The condition of Rome was very bleak before the reign of Augustus but was completely turned around by his death in 14 A.D. His understanding of the importance of a well organized city must have come from his ability and training the ways of the Roman military which he had learned from Julius Caesar and

²⁶ Coulston, Jon, Dodge Hazel. Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 170

²⁷ Coulston, Jon, Dodge Hazel. Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 189

displayed at the Battle of Actium. This organization would continue to evolve after his reign but the trace to this organization will be tied to Augustus. If it had not been for Augustus Rome might not have become the city that would rule the Mediterranean and the prosperity of Rome's people would have been different. As Augustus was emperor his intentions were to act as a *paterfamilias* or family head.²⁸ His best interest was in the preservation of the city of Rome and to continue to have an appropriate image.

Augustus's attention to the infrastructure of Rome set the stage for improvements to the city that would move it from a normal metropolis to an iconic eternal city. These works secured the future and functionality of the city continuing the traditions of Rome and its people.

²⁸ Galinski., 246

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